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NEW ORLEANS SERVES UP FINE ARTS TO FEED YOUNG EGOS.

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THE EDUCATIONAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECT IS CONDUCTING A FINE ARTS PROGRAM FOR DISADVANTAGED PUPILS AT TWO PREDOMINANTLY NEGRO NEW ORLEANS ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS. THE PROGRAM HAS A TWO-FOLD GOAL--TO FOSTER CREATIVITY IN THE PUPILS AND TO DEVELOP TEACHERS' AWARENESS OF STUDENT ADJUSTMENT AND LEARNING PROBLEMS. INCLUDED IN THE PROJECT ARE MUSIC EDUCATION AND ART AND THEATER EXPERIENCES. AN "ALLIED COMMUNICATION ARTS PROCESS" IS USED TO INTERRELATE THESE ACTIVITIES WITH THE LANGUAGE ARTS. CONSULTANTS IN THE ARTS FROM TWO LOCAL UNIVERSITIES HELP TEACHERS TO DEVELOP EXPERIMENTAL TEACHING TECHNIQUES. THIS ARTICLE WAS PUBLISHED IN THE "SOUTHERN EDUCATION REPORT," VOLUME 3, NUMBER 7, MARCH 1968. (NH)

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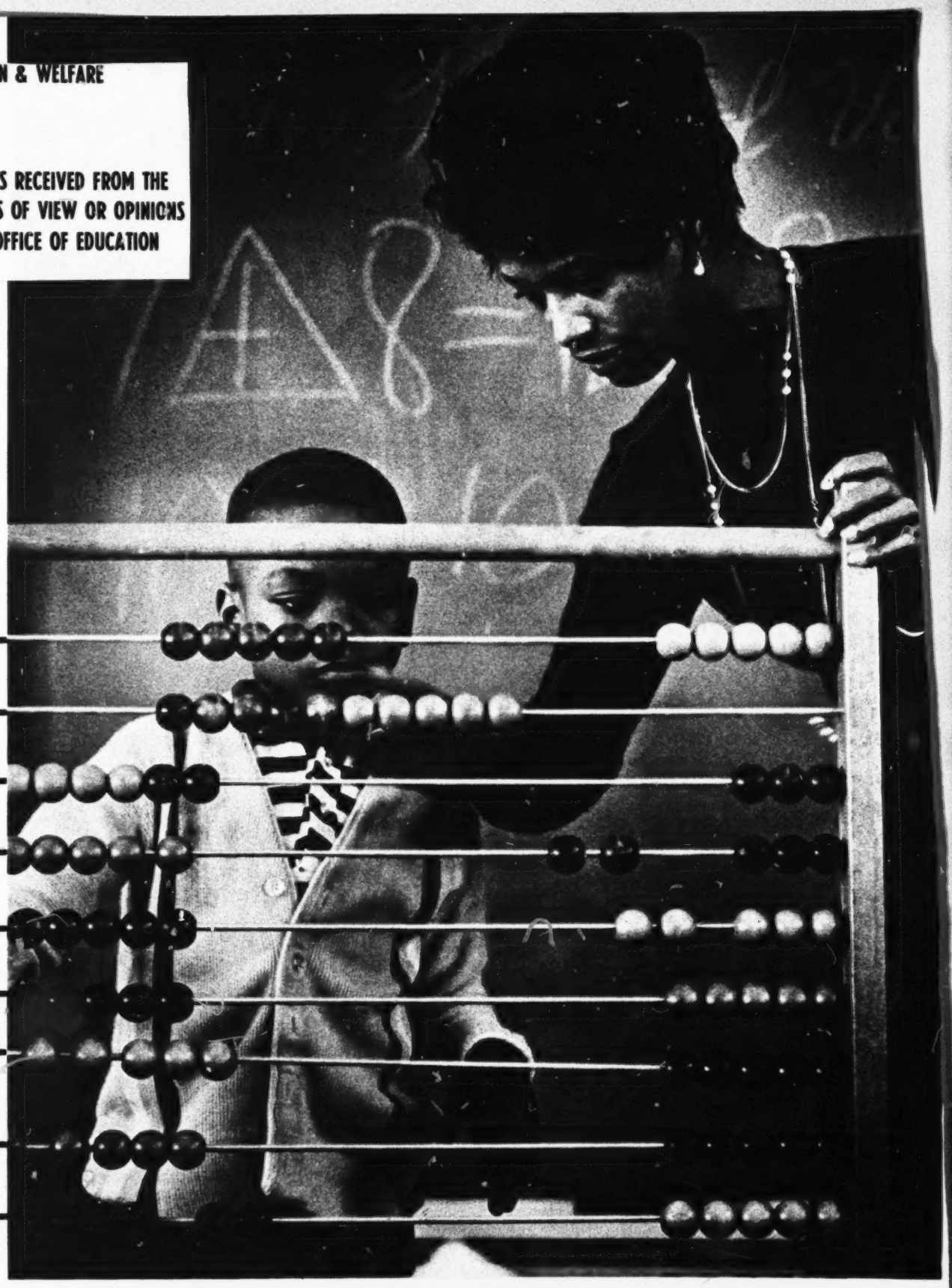

By Patricia Gormin

Feed a young ego generous servings of art, music, dramatics and dance. When a youngster has a well-nourished awareness of himself, the better his chances for academic achievement. Children from disadvantaged homes often don't know themselves at all.

On this premise, the New Orleans Education Improvement Project is taking activities that sometimes are considered on the fringes of education and relating them to success in "regular" school work. The fine arts, along with an "allied communication arts process," are used to involve students directly with the subjects they are studying in classrooms.

The five-year project, now in its second year, is searching for improved techniques in elementary-school teaching. Funded by the Ford Foundation, the enterprise presumes that each child has an unlimited potential—and sets out to give him the specific help he needs to develop it.

From the arts comes creativity, and from creativity comes the phenomenon of "reinvention." It is this ability to "reinvent" that is emphasized, rather than the facts and skills in the arts that may be the end

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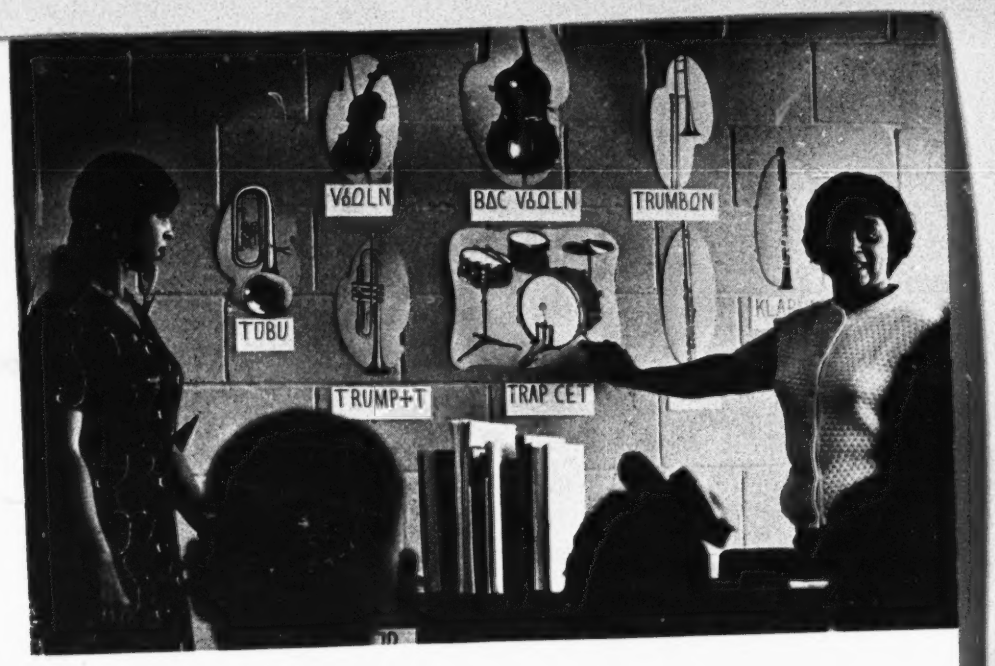
Patricia Gormin is education editor of the New Orleans States-Item.



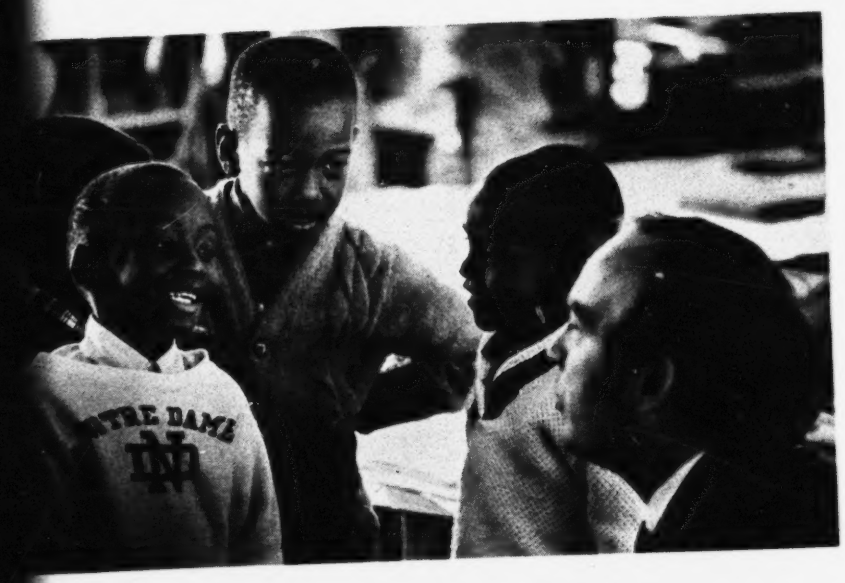
products. Such "reinvention" can be applied to the project's programs in reading, science, mathematics and social studies.

The project is carried on at the Medard H. Nelson and Edward H. Phillips schools, located within three blocks of each other in Negro neighborhoods where financial resources are meager. Several other projects in New Orleans are directed toward cultural enrichment, but NOEIP is credited with the most comprehensive in-school program of supplemental cultural education for elementary-school students.

The goal, says Dr. Stanton D. Plattor, director, is to develop the teacher's awareness of each student's adjustment and learning problems. Experimental ways of teaching have been built around sharpening that awareness. Standardized tests were given at both schools, he recalled, to provide bases for evaluating the program as it goes along.

Consultants in the arts are borrowed from Dillard and Tulane universities, joint sponsors of the project with the Orleans Parish School Board. The project this year involves 100 teachers and 2,000 pupils.

Mrs. Violet Bowers, music consultant from Dillard, has helped classroom teachers develop an approach to music education that stresses the intrinsic more than the extrinsic values of music. Children are led to discover, explore and understand music in their own terms. "It places children inside the music rather than on the periphery," Mrs. Bowers says.



From the first grade, the music education system is based on rhythm syllables and much physical movement. The pentatonic (five-toned) scale is taught through the use of tone syllables and a movable "do." It is introduced before the standard diatonic (eight-note) scale because, Mrs. Bowers believes, children should begin their singing by eliminating the difficult-to-hear half tones.

This year, classroom concerts were started for kindergarten and for first- and second-grade students, and there are concert performances especially for junior-high-school pupils.

A music reading program for select classes on the first-grade level has been established and will be followed for three years. Evaluation of musical growth and skills will come at the end of the third year.

Mrs. Bowers is optimistic about the experiment in music education. "The children are enthusiastic," she says. "They are at liberty to express themselves freely with movement." They like the classroom song fests and other presentations, and group participation "seems to give each student needed confidence and presence of being."

Parents of the students have attended concerts with their children, and the music program urges parents to offer musical experiences at home.

Both boys and girls have accepted music as a comfortable learning adjunct, Mrs. Bowers says. She believes the sense of belonging to a performing whole accounts for the apparent successs. "No child is isolated," and each has a vital part. The children's theater program, directed by Mrs. Linda Seagrave from Dillard University and Gerald Hoke from Tulane University, is designed to provide the teacher and student with a rich extra-curricular activity and to offer a new means for presenting classroom lessons.

Because children's theater is a correlation of the arts, a framework of several artistic skills is provided for the teachers. The first-semester program is devoted to teachers' exposure to the theater and to training in a new vocabulary and art form. Teachers during six weeks of biweekly workshops are taught to select, plan, direct and produce full-length children's plays. Throughout the academic year, all elementary teach-

ers have the opportunity to attend "Theatre '67," a series of drama presentations in the community.

At the conclusion of the teacher orientation period, the children saw a production of "Jack and the Beanstalk" by the Teen Club of Le Petit Theatre du Vieux Carre, a popular local amateur production group. It was the first play most of them had ever seen; they hissed the giant and showed "Jack" where to hide. They stayed for a second showing, during which they "fed" lines to the actors.

When they met the cast after the show, the young members of the audience had a hard time realizing that the teen-agers were not the characters in the fantasy. "Why are you so mean?" the giant was asked.

Children who usually were reticent to speak out responded freely, Mrs. Seagrave reported. "They participated in role playing and role identifications."

The first teacher-pupil activity came at Christmas, with an assembly play. An eight-week seminar and workshop for fifth- and sixth-graders is planned for next spring.

Mrs. Seagrave regards children's theater as an essential part of the program. "Here, habits of listening, relating to the group, making decisions and thinking on one's feet are encouraged, and the child has an enjoyable activity in which to learn more about himself, his world and the contributions he can make to the world."

Vernon Winslow, an art consultant from Dillard, works primarily to release the full creative potential of each teacher by establishing every teacher as the "artist," "sculptor" or "painter."

Working with unconventional media, such as vegetables and bits of string, he encourages uninhibited creative expression by the teacher who, in turn, can direct free-form artistic efforts by the pupils.

The allied communication arts process, designed to interrelate art, music, drama and the language arts, was established last fall. It seeks to increase the students' ability to communicate by providing a series of multisensory experiences that are intended to develop a sense of self-realization.

Winslow, chairman of the ACA committee, gave as an example of the multisensory approach this technique for reading a story about boats: Students see and touch boats constructed of paper, they go on boat rides and they participate in a dramatic depiction of a boat; they make sounds like boats and assume boatlike positions. Winslow said that a language specialist helps children create the appropriate sounds so "they do not go off on a creative binge."

"We zoom in on word meaning and perception," he said, "and the story is received with excitement." The teacher loads the students with details and facts that become the basis for the story.

"The monolithic concept of words," Winslow contends, is out. The ACA approach gives meaning on many levels.

It is more than "art for the sake of art" in the New Orleans Education Improvement Project. It is art for the sake of self-awareness, for the sake of all-round education, for the sake of a better life. O